

# THE STANDARD

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## MEDITATION

### At The Evening Of The Year

"... Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves. Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. . . ."

—Psalm 80.

O God!

Thou Shepherd of Israel!

Thou that ledest Joseph like a flock!

Thou, O God! that dwelleth between the cherubim!

In the darkness of this hour we have but one prayer, nay, it is a suppliant cry: Shine forth!

If only Thou wilt shine forth within the depths of our hearts and minds, then all will be well with us, for then we will be saved.

We have sung it so very often: Shine Thou from above!

It is so very dark. It is dark in our world of men. After sixty centuries the world of men is on the brink of a terrible war. And we are co-guilty. The fault is ours too. And we better take it to heart for we are the only people that have been taught to pray. There are so many who pray not for they cannot pray.

Shine Thou from above, and instill the need of prayer and supplication within our hearts!

Our world of men is so very wicked. We have grown ever more wicked. Since that day when Thou camest down to earth to visit us in our sin and guilt, and criest unto us: Adam, where are thou? we have corrupted our way as a race of men, and this evening of the year finds us in horrible sin and guilt.

And the wrath of Thine is revealed from the heavens. There is a rumbling of the thunder of the approaching war that is terrible. It makes our hearts cringe with fear. And at this late date we cannot travel to fields and cities where there is no danger

from Thy avenging visitation. The whole world is on the brink of a terrible abyss. We are all hovering on the very brink of the abyss which we created.

And all know it, but all do not pray.

But we will pray, O God!

For Thou art our Shepherd!



Thou art dwelling between the cherubim! And that is beautiful. For it brings to mind the ark of the Covenant. And the Ark brings to mind the mercy seat. And the mercy seat brings to mind the blood of the innocents. And the blood of the innocents brings to mind the Blood of *L'Innocence par excellence*! It brings to mind Jesus, our Saviour.

And so we take courage to pray.

If it were not for *L'Innocence* we would not dare to pray.

If it were not for Jesus we would not be able to pray. If it were not for the Christ of God we would not want to pray. And we may not pray to Thee outside of that Mediator. It is only when the Christ of God dwells with His Holy Spirit in us that we are acceptable in Thy sight.

And so we come in Jesus' Name before Thee in this dark night and pray: Shine forth, O Shepherd of Israel!

Forgive graciously all our sins which we have in common with the wicked world. During the year that is now spent we also have sinned with that world. That world of wickedness, namely, the lust of the eyes, and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, has also lived in us during this past year, and so we petition Thee to forgive our many sins for the sake of the blood of Jesus.

O, shine forth with the light of Thy salvation in our hearts, and we shall be saved. And then the wicked world shall see the difference. And we shall be as walking Evangelists in the midst of them, and our walk and conversation shall be a witness for Thee. It shall either draw others to the sheepfold, or it shall

condemn them now and in the day of Thy final visitation. But shine forth, O God of our salvation!



O God!

Thou Shepherd of Israel!

We would humbly speak of Thee of our conduct of Israel in Israel.

Israel is Thy church on earth.

It is the congregation of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and their seed.

Israel has always been throughout all the ages, for Jesus has gathered them from the beginning of the world, even till this late day. And we are persuaded that He will continue to gather them until the last of God's own are saved, and time ended. And then Thou shalt be all in Israel. And that shall be heaven.

But the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a very sorry spectacle. She has forgotten the name of her God and spread abroad her hands unto the Baalim and the Ashtaroth. And there was a culmination even in the year which is now almost gone. We are ashamed of ourselves as members of the church of Christ. We are divided as never before. We are broken in many different branches and churches and denominations and sects. And we all claim the name of the Shepherd of Israel, and boast ourselves of the Saviour Jesus Christ. O Lord God of Hosts how long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people?

It is now very much worse than in the days of wicked and cruel Rehoboam. In his days there also was a division of the hosts of Israel, but the children of the Most High were only divided in two camps. And now?

O, we know that Thou wert behind it. The rending of the Kingdom of God was of the Lord. But we also know that it came about by the wanton wickedness of Israel. We will not hide behind Thy glorious counsel and say: it was of the Lord! And in the midst of our great wickedness we will not wash our filthy hands in innocency and say: we are clean, without transgression!

O God! In this very late hour on the clock of the history of the world we confess our sins, we confess our part in the awful debacle which the church manifests in this present hour! We are sorry for our sins. Forgive!

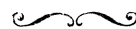
And we know that Thou gavest tears for bread, and Thou gavest us tears to drink in great measure.

The world, the wicked world saw all this and they laughed. Thou makest us, the church, a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves. With one more scornful glance they look backward, on the way to their temples of glory (but it is not: it is the lobby of hell), and seeing our strife and

division, they loudly say: Is that beautiful, glorious Zion? Is that the city of which it was said that it was "The perfection of Beauty, and The joy of the whole earth?"

O God, forgive!

Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.



O God!

Thou Shepherd of Israel!

Cause Thy face to shine upon us, and we shall be saved!

When the vine which Thou hast brought out of Egypt corrupted herself (and we belonged to that vine, and we are and were ashamed of our part), then Thou camest: Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.

There be many among us that remember it very well. O, we know that Thou hast done this time and time again: we read the history of the church in the Old Testament and in the New. And we have noted the same terrible, but also beautiful rhythm in Thy dealings with this vine from Egypt. They corrupted themselves; they cried because of Thy visitation; they repented; and Thou camest to cleanse Thy vine; and Thou wouldst plant her again. And they corrupted themselves anew. And the same rhythm repeated itself. O, it was awful and terrible when we see the part of our unfaithfulness through the ages. But we marvel at Thy love when we see the wonder of Thy patience and forbearance with us.

And, yes, we remember it very well. When the church corrupted herself in our days, and when we cried tears in our suffering, Thou camest: drove out the heathen and planted us.

We have lived in the days, and many with me, that saw the shining face of Jehovah, and we were saved again and again.

We even remember the details, the very particulars of that wondrous visitation.

Other generations spoke for a long time of the particulars of their own individual salvation which followed the shining face of God. Some spoke of Enoch, others of Noah, the preacher of righteousness: O, how these men were hated! Later we have heard of generations which spoke of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Still later they remembered Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephtha, David also, and Samuel and the prophets! These men lived and spoke, even after they were dead. Do you, beloved, remember the testimony which the Holy Ghost gave of Phinehas? Listen: "Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment: and so the plague was stayed. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore."

O God!

Thou Shepherd of Israel!

Shine forth in the beauty of Holiness, and we shall be saved.

O yes, we remember Thee, how Thou didst terrible things which we looked not for. We were in great bondage of corruption, and the corruption was of our own making.

But Thou spakest and Thou calledst a man of Thy choosing, and we were planted again.

I still remember how the psalms of David were sung in the old Eastern Avenue church, and how they sounded different, much different. And Israel breathed again. And there came a different sound, a sound unmixed with the false sound of man-worship. For that is the testing stone of the ages: What do you think of God and of man? The wicked had built a fence around about wicked man: they were going to defend reprobate man. And the Three Infamous Points were accepted. And the preaching in Israel was in harmony with those wicked lies. They lied continually about God: He did not hate man exclusively! He loves man, wicked, reprobate man, even though only for the span of life on earth! And they lied continuously about man also: man is not so wicked as he is painted by some quaint preachers, but he can do that which is good in the sight of a perfect and holy God!

O, how we loathed that Baal-worship!

But a different sound was heard there where God planted His vine anew.

And this vine prospered.

Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.

Is this not true? It began in Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo. But today it is spread all over the world. They will read this meditation in Transvaal.

And for many years we have basked in the Sunlight of the Face of God.

We were saved under the shining canopy of a bountiful heaven.

From many pulpits the beautiful truth of God was heard anew.

O God! This vine which Thou plantedst in 1924 covered the hills with the shadows of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river.

Is it not true? There be many at this time of writing who could give testimony to the truth of this statement. Even among those who cruelly cast us out (but they did not know, and we knew it not, that this thing was of the Lord) there be many who would tell you that they breathed easier under the shadow of this vine of God which was called Protestant Reformed Churches for these last twenty-six years.

Salvation in these churches was wondrous and full.

A full Gospel was preached and lived there. And it was all of God. God reformed His church in nineteen hundred and twenty-four. There was exactly nothing of man in it.

But we were saved.



O God!

Thou Shepherd of Israel!

Why hast Thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.

History repeats itself.

I must go back in the psalm and quote another verse which sorrow we quoted before: Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves.

History repeats itself with abominable regularity. It were hoping too much to think that we would be possessors of this beautiful sunshine of God's face undisturbed. The wild boar and the wild beast are ever rampant. And they are the devil. And the devil is the liar.

And, O God! we all are guilty. If we search ourselves honestly we will discover that there is no one among us who is not guilty of the heinous sin that the foul-smelling lie of the devil is again corrupting Thy heritage.

We have not watched over Thy heritage as we should have.

There were times, O Thou Shepherd of Israel, that every man, woman and child of Thy vine abhorred the foul lie of Hynsianism among us. We fought against, we loathed it, we cast it out, and we threw up barriers against it.

But now we walk delicately and speak softly. We allow the foul visage of that corruption to appear among us again and again.

But this insidious speech is becoming louder and more strident. It acts, as it ever did, as though it is part and parcel of our heritage, of the vine which Thou plantedst.

And so, O God, we pray Thee, return again, we beseech Thee, O God of Hosts, cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved!

Why should the heathen say: Their God has forsaken them? Why should they laugh, and say: they have become like one of us? And indeed, O Thou Shepherd of Israel, unless Thou return, we shall be as the salt that has lost its savour, and as the cleansed swine wallowing itself in the mire.

Return again, and we shall be saved!

G. Vos.

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### CONTENTS

#### MEDITATION—

- At The Evening Of The Year .....145  
Rev. Gerrit Vos

#### EDITORIALS—

- The Declaration Not A Mistake .....148  
Rev. H. Hoeksema
- The Declaration, A Mistake .....153  
Rev. B. Kok
- Unnecessary and Necessary Things .....156  
Rev. J. Blankespoor
- What Is The Truth? .....159  
S. Reitsma, Hamilton, Ont.
- The Rest Of Brother Ten Elshof's Article .....161  
Rev. Petter's Fifth Instalment .....162  
Rev. G. M. Ophoff

#### FROM HOLY WRIT—

- Exposition Of Hebrews 10:19-25 .....166  
Rev. Geo. C. Lubbers

#### IN HIS FEAR—

- A Healthy Attitude .....164  
Rev. H. C. Hoeksema

## EDITORIALS

### The Declaration Not A Mistake

In another part of this issue of *The Standard Bearer* an article appears of the Rev. B. Kok under the heading, "The Declaration a Mistake".

On this article the present editorial is a reflection. I invite the reader, therefore, to read the article of Rev. Kok first, before turning to this present editorial.

The Rev. Kok writes: "I am becoming more and more convinced that 'The Declaration of Principles' adopted by our last synod to be proposed to our churches was a sad mistake, and that we as churches should reject them. I base this contention not so much because of their doctrinal content, but rather on the following grounds: first that the decision to adopt these declarations and propose them to our churches was contrary to article 30 of our Church Order. Secondly, that the Synod of 1950 acted too hastily in this matter. Thirdly, that this action of synod has been, and, if God does not graciously forbid, would be the cause of dissension and schism in our churches. Finally, that the questions involved are extra-confessional and hence may not determine membership or non-membership in the church of Christ."

The Rev. Kok writes that he bases his contention that the Declaration is a mistake "not so much" on their doctrinal contents. That "not so much" is an expression which is, of course, ambiguous in itself. It seems to suggest that Rev. Kok is also opposed to the contents of the Declaration. How much he is opposed to it is a question. But I wish he would have stated clearly just in how far he does not agree with the Declaration of Principles. In these troublous times we must state very clearly what we mean, and not have recourse to ambiguous expressions. This is necessary especially because, as the Rev. Kok suggests, he envisions the possibility of a schism in our churches. I say once more: I do not look for a schism. I certainly will not work for a schism. I would deplore a schism. But nevertheless, if it comes we must be very clear in our minds what the schism is about, so that we can take sides definitely. That is very important. Besides, I also deplore the fact that the Rev. Kok bases his contention that the Declaration is a mistake "not so much because of their doctrinal content" but because of other reasons. I say I deplore this because thus once more the principal question is avoided. And that principal question is simply whether or not the Declaration of Principles is the confessions.

The Rev. Kok, however, has four grounds. These four grounds I will briefly discuss in the present edi-

torial. To make this editorial more pleasant reading I will split it up into four sections, following the order of the four grounds which the Rev. Kok offers.

### Synod Had a Mandate.

The first contention of the Rev. Kok is that synod violated article 30 of the Church Order, which I quote here once more: "In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted and that in an ecclesiastical manner. In major assemblies only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common."

I have already answered the objection that was based on article 30 of the Church Order in my answer to the Rev. Blankespoor. But I will gladly repeat and elaborate a little on this answer, in order that the churches may understand that the Synod of 1950 certainly did not violate an article of the Church Order.

The main question in the Rev. Kok's mind seems to be whether or not Synod had a mandate, and therefore had a right to compose such a document as the Declaration of Principles and propose it to the churches in order to be adopted at our next synod.

This the Rev. Kok denies.

And this I most emphatically maintain.

I maintain this on the ground of the last part of Article 30 of the Church Order, namely, that such matters must be dealt with in major assemblies that "pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common." Now the Mission Committee is a synodical committee, appointed by the synod to interest themselves in and consider all matters that pertain to our mission work. They do not report to the consistories; nor do they report to the classes. But they report directly to synod. There can therefore be no question that the matters pertaining to the Mission Committee certainly belong to synod. This is also true of matters pertaining, say, to the Theological School. Suppose the Theological School Committee proposes such an important matter as the appointment of an additional professor for the Theological School. Must they go to the consistories, and through the consistories to classis? We know better. They simply make a nomination and place the nomination before the synod, in order to accept or to reject or to add to the nomination and then choose and appoint an additional professor. That belongs to the churches in common. The same is true of the matters pertaining to the Mission Committee. They do not appeal to the minor assemblies, but directly appeal to the synod, because it is like the Theological School Committee simply a synodical committee. The Rev. Kok thinks that if the Mission

Committee wanted a definite form as a basis for the organization of churches, they should have appealed to the calling church, from the calling church to the classis, and from the classis to synod. But this would be a fundamental mistake. How can a synodical committee appeal to consistory or classis? They have nothing to do with the local consistories and certainly have nothing to do with the classes. And therefore the Mission Committee certainly went the proper ecclesiastical way when with their request for a form they appealed directly to Synod.

Now in the Mission Committee the question arose repeatedly: on what basis could they organize churches, especially in Canada and among the Liberated immigrants? Repeatedly they faced the question what was binding in the Protestant Reformed Churches, especially with regard to the covenant and the promise. And I quote from the report of the Mission Committee: "This same question as to what is 'bindend' in the Prot. Ref. Churches is raised by those who seek organization. Now it is true, that our missionaries labor among them and instruct them in the specific doctrines God has entrusted to us as Prot. Ref. Churches, but we would appreciate having something uniform and definite to present to those groups, particularly when they request organization. Therefore, your committee requests synod to draw up a form that may be used by those families requesting organization into a Prot. Ref. congregation. We believe that this would serve to remove all misunderstanding and aid toward unity."

There was therefore a definite request by the synodical Mission Committee which could only appeal to synod, and which the synod had to consider. There is therefore no question at all as to whether the synod had a proper mandate before it.

Now the committee of pre-advice in re this matter came to the synod with the following advice:

"a. To adopt the following clear-cut expression as one which should appear in each request for organization, along with the denial of common grace and the Three Points of 1924, and profession of adherence to the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order of Dordrecht and professing the Scriptures to be the infallible Word of God (as stands to reason): 'The promise of the Gospel, both as to the will of God to save His people and the execution of His will to save them, is not general, that is, it does not include all the baptized children of the church, but is particular, that is, it pertains only to the elect of God.'

"b. To send the above proposed expression to all our consistories for their reactions and to advise them to bring their findings to Synod via Classis, since such proposed action ought to follow the proper Reformed Church Political way of consistory, classis and synod." Acts of Synod, 1950, Article 63, p. 54.



The Synod agreed with this advice in principle, but did not deem it sufficient. And therefore it decided to appoint the same committee of pre-advice, together with the theological professors as advisors, to draw up a broader form. And the result of this action is the proposed Declaration of Principles.

And therefore I maintain that the synod had a very definite mandate, and that it violated no principle of the Church Order whatsoever.

The Rev. Kok quotes elaborately from what I wrote concerning the action of the Synod of the Netherlands, 1936. That is rather cute of the Rev. Kok, because he makes it appear as if I myself condemned the action of our Synod of 1950.

But in the first place, let me say that I still maintain all that I wrote concerning the action of the Synod of 1936 in the Netherlands. But the quotation which the Rev. Kok makes does not apply to our Synod of 1950 at all. The Synod of the Netherlands of 1936 had no mandate to take up the matter concerning the "meeningsgeschillen" whatsoever. The question was simply introduced on the floor of the synod by, I believe, one delegate and one professor, or maybe by two delegates,—I speak from memory. But the fact is that in 1936 there was no mandate. And therefore the delegates had no calling from the churches to consider and discuss the matter concerning the different doctrinal opinions that were debated in the churches. But in the case of our Synod of 1950 it was quite different. The synod had a definite mandate because it had to consider a question from the Mission Committee concerning the proper way to organize Prot. Ref. Churches. And therefore the comparison which the Rev. Kok makes between my writing and the action of Synod, 1950, is not to the point at all.

I still maintain, therefore, that the Synod of 1950 did right, and violated no principle whatsoever of the Church Order of Dordrecht.

#### Not Hastily, But High Time.

The next ground of the Rev. Kok why he thinks that the Declaration is a mistake is that the Synod acted too hastily.

To this I answer that the Synod not only acted wisely and not too hastily, but that it is high time that a declaration such as the synod proposed is adopted by our churches.

Again, this second ground of Rev. Kok's objection to the Declaration of Principles consists almost entirely of quotations from what I wrote in the past. And again, let me say that all I wrote there I still maintain. But it is not to the point as an objection to the Declaration of Principles.

The Rev. Kok underscores the following sentences out of my writing: "And under such circumstances it is deplorable that the synod so narrowed the denominational walls that within them there is room only for those that subscribe to the view of certain theologians to the exclusion of all others."

This exactly touches the point.

For in the Declaration of Principles I maintain that we do not narrow any denominational walls. We simply quote the Confessions. Once more I want to emphasize that the whole Declaration is almost entirely a quotation from the Confessions. And once more I wish to state that one that has objections to that Declaration must definitely point out that it is not the Confessions and is not directly based upon the Confessions, but that it is extra-confessional or anti-confessional.

In the second place, do not forget that we as Protestant Reformed Churches have a different history from the churches in the Netherlands before 1944. The result is that we have developed a rather definite and beautiful conception of the covenant, based upon the Confessions, and especially upon the Baptism Form, which we do not like to see corrupted.

In the third place, do not forget that in 1924 we were cast out by the Christian Reformed Churches because of our denial of common grace and very emphatically and more particularly because we denied that the preaching of the gospel is grace for all, including the reprobate. Now, Heynsianism, as we all know, is common grace applied to the sphere of the covenant. According to Heyns the very essence of the covenant is the promise of God. And that promise is well-meaning for all the children that are born under the covenant, that is, to all the children that are baptized. Only, the promise is conditional, a condition which must be fulfilled by those that are baptized when they come to years of discretion. This we denied. And because of our objection to this pernicious doctrine, which is simply Pelagianism and Arminianism we were cast out from the communion of the Christian Reformed Churches. And instead we maintained our own conception of the covenant, which is definitely based on the Confessions and on the Baptism Form, that, namely, the covenant is an eternal covenant of friendship, that God establishes His covenant only with the elect, that the children of the promise are the only seed, and that God establishes His covenant with His elect unconditionally.

Now at present we confront the question whether we shall throw open the doors of our churches for this pernicious doctrine of Heynsianism. For as was evident from the very first numbers of the *Reformatie* (after the war) the Liberated, although they do not officially maintain any doctrine of the covenant, never-

theless almost without exception embrace this Heynsian conception of the covenant. That is the question which we confront. If we do, I propose that we apologize to the Christian Reformed Churches and admit that the doctrine of common grace, as they adopted it in 1924, especially with a view to the preaching of the gospel and to the promise for all, was principally correct.

In brief, the question: shall we embrace Heynsianism, or shall we remain Protestant Reformed?

The Rev. Kok quotes me as if, after I wrote those sentences, nothing happened. But that is not the case. It would have been much more to the point had he quoted me not in regard to what was done in the Netherlands but in regard to our position here as Protestant Reformed Churches. He should have quoted me, for instance, from what I wrote in "A Letter to Dr. Schilder" in the *Standard Bearer*, Vol. XXV, p. 508, ff. There I wrote:

"Before 1924 we stood on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity pure and simple, without any additions, and without feeling the need of any separate interpretation of those confessions. We were all in the Christian Reformed Churches. Within those churches we did not at all think alike. There were, of course, supralapsarians and infralapsarians, there were those that held the Heynsian conception of the covenant and others who held the theory of presupposed regeneration, and still others (like myself) who favored a still different conception. Within the same church there arose the controversy concerning common grace. Did all this difference of opinion and conception mean that I contemplated the organization of a separate church? It never entered my mind. We were, at that time, of the opinion that our confessional walls were wide enough to harbour many different theological views, and would gladly leave it to free discussion to determine which one of all these different views would ultimately gain the victory. . . .

"We stood on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity without anything further.

"But whoever claims that this is still the case does not know what he is talking about.

"To be sure, amice, you can quote me to the effect that we recognize no other standards than the Three Forms of Unity. And this is certainly true. But you must never forget to add: *in distinction from the 'Three Points'*."

"You must never forget the Christian Reformed Churches put us in a corner all by ourselves, and that from that corner they forced us to fight for the truth.

"They cast us out.

"They demanded of us a promise that we would never teach anything against the 'three points', and when we refused because we could not conscientiously

make such a promise, they expelled us on the basis of 'ecclesiastical insubordination.'

"Now, you certainly will understand, amice, that, after 1924, our churches are no longer open to the doctrinal errors of the three points, and that we certainly do not receive anyone into our communion that propagates those errors. Our church doors are closed to them. Hence, the rejection of all that is taught in the three points is binding in our churches. That is the official stand of our Protestant Reformed Churches. In other words, we still stand on the basis of our Three Forms of Unity *but now as interpreted in distinction from the errors of the three points*. That is officially binding.

"And that also implies that the rejection of the Heynsian conception of the covenant is binding in our churches, and that there is no room for the view of the liberated in our communion."

And a little later in the same Letter to Dr. Schilder I wrote:

"Now, the Liberated Churches reject the Kuyperian view of common grace. But they are not consistent, for they still maintain the Heynsian view. Do not say that this is not true, amice, and that you have no officially binding view of the covenant. For in the first place, you refused as churches to be bound by the decisions of 1942-1943 and 1946, and, in the second place, all that is ever written by the leaders of your churches supports the Heynsian view of the covenant. When you say that you stand on the basis of the Confessions, you mean that the Heynsian view of the covenant, excepting, perhaps, his theory of preparatory grace, is the true interpretation of those Confessions in distinction from the interpretation of the synodicals. And that means that your churches still maintain 'het puntje van het eerste punt', with application to the covenant. For what else is the conception that the promise is for all the children that are born in the historical line of the covenant than that of grace for all, elect and reprobate alike? Certainly, the Liberated, however they may wish to separate election, and especially reprobation, and the covenant, cannot deny that there are reprobate in the historical line of the covenant. And if they maintain that the promise is for all, head for head, they at the same time maintain that God is gracious to the reprobate.

"And the rejection of the first point of 1924 makes it binding upon all our churches to reject this view of the Liberated."

I maintain, therefore:

1. That in the Declaration of Principles we do not narrow any ecclesiastical walls, but simply quote and refer to the Confessions. If this is not so, let anyone point it out, including the Rev. Kok. No more than we narrowed ecclesiastical walls when we condemned the

doctrine of Dr. Jansen in 1922 with an appeal to our Confessions, no more do we narrow any ecclesiastical walls by condemning Heynsianism with appeal to our Confessions and to our Baptism Form.

2. That the Synod certainly did not act hastily, but that it was high time that such a clear-cut declaration was drawn up, lest our churches be swamped by the Heynsian view of the covenant as introduced by the Liberated into our churches. That this danger exists is very evident. I refer you to the history of our congregation at Hamilton as it was published in an article by the Rev. H. Veldman in the preceding *Standard Bearer*. And I also refer you to the article of Mr. IJtsma from Chatham, as well as to the letter by Mr. Van Spronsen.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not narrow minded. I do not believe that we are the true church in the sense in which Mr. Van Spronsen wants us to maintain this doctrine, while all the rest are false churches. I even would like to have correspondence still with the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands. I still have respect for men like Dr. Schilder and Professor Veenhof and others. In fact, I have respect for Prof. Holwerda. But mind you, I love them as brethren, and I have respect for them, and I want correspondence with them, however, outside of the pale of our churches. Hamilton as a congregation does not want to be Protestant Reformed. A man like Mr. IJtsma is not Protestant Reformed and never will be, very likely, according to his utterances. And I will have respect for them all, but not as members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, that must answer the second question in baptism whether they believe the doctrine that is taught here in this Christian church.

Let us be honest before God, also as churches.

### Schism?

The Rev. Kok also speaks of dissension and schism, and is afraid that the Declaration of Principles will be the cause of a split in our churches.

My answer is two-fold.

1. That I would deplore more than I can express a separation in our churches, which are already very small.

2. That if the Declaration of Principles, which is nothing but an expression of the Confessions, after it has been thoroughly discussed and criticized, and, if necessary, corrected, is the occasion of a separation in our churches, I can only welcome such a split.

Let me explain. What is schism?

It is the act of causing division and separation in any church, certainly not by those that strictly adhere to the confession and doctrine of that particular church,

but by those who within that church agitate against that doctrine and against that confession or try to compromise and throw open the doors of that church to doctrines that militate against the confessions of that church.

That is schism. And those that cause such a separation are the schismatics.

As an illustration of schismatic utterances I will quote from the letter sent to Chatham by Prof. Holwerda, a letter, by the way which was never publicly contradicted. According to that letter the Revs. de Jong and Kok reported in the Netherlands as follows:

"His conception (the Rev. Hoeksema's) regarding election etc. is not church doctrine. No one is bound by it. Some are emitting a totally different sound." This, of course, refers to the relation between election and the covenant, which hits at the very heart of the Protestant Reformed truth. This I consider schismatic.

The opinion of the Revs. de Jong and Kok was "that most (of the Protestant Reformed) do not think as Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Ophoff." Now no one will deny that the Revs. Ophoff and Hoeksema are undoubtedly Protestant Reformed. If most of the Protestant Reformed people disagree with them, they, the Protestant Reformed people, are not Protestant Reformed. This I consider schismatic.

According to them "sympathy for the Liberated was great also in the matter of their doctrine of the covenant." And again, "for the conception of the Liberated there is ample room." This means that there is ample room in our churches for the Heynsian heresy, and that for that Heynsian heresy they throw our doors wide open.

All this I consider schismatic talk.

But the Declaration of Principles is entirely based upon the Three Forms of Unity. It certainly represents the doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches. And therefore it can never be the cause of schism.

But if a split must come in our churches, as the Rev. Kok suggests, and as others have also intimated, and as it is even rumored in the old country, I hope that the issues that divide those that deviate from those that want to maintain the Protestant Reformed truth are clearly stated.

We must not, for instance, talk about the responsibility of man, which no one denies. The accusation that Reformed people deny the responsibility of man is an old, old story. It is aimed not only at the doctrine of election, but also at the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This, therefore, is not the issue at all.

Let us rather state the issue as follows: *The Protestant Reformed Churches want to shut their doors against the Heynsian heresy, while those that do not*



*care for Protestant Reformed truth want to open the doors of the churches wide to admit that heresy.*

But the adoption of the Declaration of Principles can indeed serve to purify the Protestant Reformed Churches and to bring to light clearly what divides us, but is itself certainly not a cause of schism.

#### Intra-Confessional.

The final ground upon which the Rev. Kok bases his contention that the Declaration is a mistake reads briefly as follows: "Finally, I object to the 'Declaration of Principles' because the questions involved in this controversy are of such a nature that they are either extra-confessional, or at least debatable, and therefore may not determine membership or non-membership in the church of Christ."

It is deplorable that in this fourth ground, so-called, the Rev. Kok entirely avoids the issue. He does not enter into the contents of the Declaration of Principles at all. He does not discuss it. He says it is debatable, but himself does not debate at all. He does not say in how far he agrees or disagrees with the Declaration of Principles. And in this way he does not give us an opportunity to contradict him.

I say that this is deplorable, because after all this is the sole issue.

One thing, however, I deny. And that is the statement of the Rev. Kok that the Declaration is extra-confessional, that is, that it is outside of the Confessions.

I claim not only that the matters touched upon in the Declaration of Principles are entirely within the Confession, but also that the Declaration itself is confessional and is entirely based on the Three Forms of Unity.

It is purely Protestant Reformed.

This claim I offer to the Rev. Kok as a subject for debate. Let him debate it, and I will answer. But let us not avoid the issue.

Let us not just employ big terms, but clearly state and prove our contentions.

Then we will get somewhere.

H. H.

#### CLASSIS EAST

will meet in regular session Wednesday at 9 o'clock A.M., January 3, 1951, at Fuller Ave.

All matters for Synod must be brought to this Classis, such as: subsidy requests, and the reports of the Consistories on the Brief Declaration of Principles.

D. Jonker,  
Stated Clerk.

## The Declaration, A Mistake

I am becoming more and more convinced that the 'Declaration of Principles' adopted by our last Synod to be proposed to our churches was a sad mistake, and that we as Churches should reject them. I base this contention not so much because of their doctrinal content, but rather on the following grounds: First that the decision to adopt these declarations and propose them to our Churches was contrary to Article 30 of our Church Order. Secondly, that the Synod of 1950 acted too hastily in this matter. Thirdly, that this action of Synod has been, and, if God does not graciously forbid, will be the cause of dissention and schism in our Churches. Finally, that the questions involved are extra-confessional and hence may not determine membership or non-membership in the Church of Christ.

Allow me to elucidate these grounds as follows: First that the decision of our last Synod to adopt these declarations and propose them to our Churches was contrary to Article 30 of our Church Order, which reads as follows: In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted and that in an ecclesiastical manner. In major assemblies only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the Churches of the major assembly in common." I cannot agree with the answer given to the Rev. Blankespoor in the Standard Bearer, Vol. 27, pages 4-6, by the Rev. H. Hoeksema, namely, that the Synod of 1950 was justified in making this 'Declaration of Principles' because it was requested to do so by its Mission Committee. Apart from the question whether or not this was the request of the Mission Committee, which I do not believe, (The Mission Committee merely requested Synod to draw up a formal letter to be signed by all those that desire to be organized into a Protestant Reformed Church) the Synod had no right to violate the principle involved in Article 30 that only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in minor assemblies. I do not believe there was any need for such a request from the Mission Committee, and therefore as member of the Mission Committee was opposed to this request, but even so, it is my firm conviction that this did not give the Synod the right to adopt this declaration of principles and propose them to the Churches. If there was any doubt in the minds of the Mission Committee as to the doctrinal position of our Protestant Reformed Churches in re this question they should have made their request to the calling church, which in this case would be the only authoritative body in this matter. Then, if no decision could be reached, they could have taken this question to Synod by the way of Classis, according to Article 31 of the Church Order. Neither do I agree that Synod was justified

because it merely adopted this declaration of principles to be proposed to the Churches. To my mind this is exactly the opposite from all Reformed Church polity which always speaks of Consistory, Classis and Synod.

That the editor of the Standard Bearer is well aware that this is the Reformed position in re Article 30 is evident from an article which he wrote in the Standard Bearer in criticism of the Synod of the Netherlands in re their adoption of a declaration of principles concerning the covenant. After quoting Article 30 of the D.K.O. he writes as follows: "The meaning of this article is clear enough. Matters that pertain to the churches, and these alone, are transacted by ecclesiastical assemblies. And they are to be transacted in an ecclesiastical manner. The power of the Church is always spiritual, not political. To this also belongs that the delegates to the major assemblies, classis, particular synod, general synod, are limited to their mandate from the churches. Matters that are to be transacted by the synod must be brought before this body in the regular way, i.e., by the way of overture from the minor assemblies. And such matters should be treated by the minor assemblies *first*, and, if they cannot be finished there, be carried on to the major assembly."

"Now, before the Synod of Amsterdam 1936 (i.e. before the time the Synod met, B.K.) several points of doctrine were matters of discussion and controversy in the Netherlands, not officially, but among the theologians and semi-theologians. . . . There was nothing official about this controversy. . . . No action had been started by anyone (i.e. before their consistories, B. K.). Nor were there, before the Synod of Amsterdam, any overtures from minor assemblies, requesting that body to take action and try to settle the doctrinal points involved in the controversies.

"Yet, without any mandate from the churches, the Synod of Amsterdam decided to make the matter of the controversies and differences of opinion its official business!

"They appointed a committee to study the matter and to report to the next synod.

"Whatever may have been the motives of those that instigated this action (and I do not believe that motives of a church-politically corrupt action are ever pure), the action itself was surely hierarchical.

"O, reasons were given for the action, to justify it. But they were utility reasons. There was too much unrest in the churches! It is for the benefit of the churches that the synod should concern itself with the matter! But all this cannot justify the fact that, in 1936, the delegates to synod assumed the position of independent lords *by doing what they had not been mandated to do*. (I underscore).

"This action was the beginning of trouble." Standard Bearer, Vol 22, p. 341. In these words we have

sound Reformed leadership, and a profound note of warning, to which also we as Churches should give heed. Do not the above accusations also concern our Synod of 1950 which drew up these 'Declarations of principles' without a mandate from our Churches? The circumstances may differ, but the principle remains.

My second ground is, that the Synod of 1950 acted too hastily in this matter of adopting these 'Declarations of Principles' in re the covenant. The doctrine of the covenant, i.e. the questions who are really in the covenant?, are there parties or parts in the covenant? is the covenant unilateral or ilateral? are the covenant promises conditional or unconditional? etc. etc. has been a controversial subject in the Reformed Churches for more than 300 years. Never have the Reformed Churches taken a definite stand, but have always regarded this subject as 'extra-confessional' and thus allowed room for differences of opinion. And I am wholeheartedly agreed with the editor of the Standard Bearer that we have no need of official opinions or declarations on this subject by hierarchical synods. He has stated time and again in the past that there is no officially established and adopted doctrine of the covenant in our Reformed churches, and that in his opinion we should not have any such official opinions, but that these questions should be left to the discussion of theologians for a long time to come. Thus we read in the Standard Bearer, Vol. 22, p. 268: "Certain it is that when the leaders of the Liberated Churches insist that all the baptized children of believers are *really* in the covenant, while the Synodicals insist that only the elect are *really* covenant children, they are not referring to the same conception of the covenant. The result is that the discussion is never distinct and clear cut. There is still considerable misunderstanding between the two groups. *And under such circumstances it is deplorable that the Synod so narrowed the denominational walls that within them there is room only for those that subscribe to the view of certain theologians to the exclusion of all others.*" (I underscore).

"For let it be emphasized once again, to date there is no clearly defined, officially adopted conception of the covenant that can lay claim to the name Reformed . . . . What right then, has the editor of *The Banner* to coin a particular view as "The Reformed View of the Covenant"? It is by such methods that certain individual views become "current views", and that, gradually these "current views" are considered to be officially Reformed, that all free discussion of extra confessional problems is smothered and denominational walls are built high and narrow.

"This, to my mind, is exactly what happened in 1924 when the Christian Reformed Churches officially adopted certain propositions on "common grace".

"And in my opinion, the same tactics were followed

by the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, when, in 1936, they took hold of certain "current opinions" and "differences of opinion" (meenings-geschillen), even without any overture or request from the churches, and thus attempted to smother the free discussion about those problems by official declarations.

"The saddest thing of all is that in this way the Church is split because certain theologians use the institute of the Church, and that, too, conceived hierarchically, to impose their notions upon all the rest.

"And the cause of the truth is not served, but put into a theologians' strait jacket."

And in the same volume of the Standard Bearer, page 54, we read: "Not, indeed, as if it is my opinion that they should have given a definite answer to the question. (i.e. the question of the covenant, B. K.) *Even if they could have reached agreement on this point among themselves*, they would, by offering an official synodical interpretation of the doctrine of the covenant, only have imposed another opinion on the churches.

*"And we have enough official 'opinions'.*

"Our Reformed standards are sufficient as a basis of unity for the Reformed Churches. We are in no need of 'Three Points' or other official declarations by hierarchical Synods. They limit one's freedom within the Confession too much, and cause dissension and schism. 1924 here, and 1942 in the Netherlands are glaring illustrations of this fact.

"No, but the Synod of 1942 in the Netherlands should have confronted this fundamental question concerning the idea of the covenant, in order that their eyes might have been opened to the fact that they were not prepared to make any definite declarations on this point whatsoever, and that they could far better, and much more safely, to be sure, as the outcome has proved, leave the matter to the free discussion by the theologians and laymen, for a long time to come.

"I most definitely cannot agree with the covenant view now presented and strongly emphasized by the "Liberated" churches.

"Nor do I agree with the 'Conclusions of Utrecht' or with the declarations made by the Netherlands Synod of 1942.

"But I deplore that they had the courage to make any doctrinal declarations, or express official synodical 'opinions' about matters that were not ripe for such dogmatical decisions.

"In my opinion, the Netherlands Synod acted very rashly in this matter."

If then, the editor of the Standard Bearer criticizes the Synod of the Netherlands as being too rash and hasty in the matter of adopting official declarations concerning the question of the covenant, after giving it into the hands of a committee for study for six years, 1936-42, what must we then say of our Synod

which appointed a committee to study this matter on a Friday evening, and then adopted the report of this committee, without any changes, in a brief evening session on the following Monday?

My third ground for objecting to the "Declaration of Principles" is, that this action has been, and if God does not graciously forbid, will be the cause of dissension and schism in our churches. Also here the recent history of the churches in the Netherlands should have been a warning to us. Certainly there are differences between us and the 'liberated', and even though I am convinced that all our ministers are agreed in re the fundamental truths in re the covenant, yet also here there may be differences of approach and emphasis. What of it? Do we all have to think alike? Must the one impose his view and conception upon the others? Cannot we say as did the Rev. Hoeksema at the conclusion of the conference we had with Prof. Schilder, "fundamentally we agreed, and for the rest we agreed to disagree"? Or as the Rev. Vos stated at that time: "However, we agree with Prof. Schilder, and also our editor of the Standard Bearer has stressed this conviction, that we ought to become sister churches, we ought to have ecclesiastical correspondence. Strictly speaking, there is no Reformed covenant view. That is, there is not one Covenant view, be it Kuyperian, Heynsian, Schilderian, or Hoeksemanian which is *confessedly* Reformed. There is for that reason room for friendly debate and exchange of ideas.

"Would to God that the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands had remembered this in 1942-44! It would have saved them from the cardinal error of throwing faithful men out of the church of their birth. If anything has become plain to us through this contact with Prof. Schilder, it is that those churches have grievously sinned. . . . In order to save a private opinion of one theologian (the covenant view of Kuyper, B. K.), and raising some formula to an accepted church dogma, they have robbed themselves to the extent of the church communion of a multitude which was theirs. . . ." Standard Bearer, Vol. 24, p. 101.

And again: "Yes, there are differences between the Liberated Churches and us. . . . Pray, Rev. Toornvliet, did not the view of the Liberated Churches anent the Covenant of Grace circulate many years in many of your churches, and by many of your ministers before 1942? And were they not considered *good, sound* and *Reformed*? Why should we, and much more, why should you cast them aside like the harlot and the publican? After hearing both sides, such as we have, we have come to the conclusion that the Reformed Churches (bound by hierarchy) have sinned grievously."

"We have learned to know Prof. Schilder as a beloved brother in Christ, as a faithful servant of that same Christ, as a man mighty in the Scriptures, as

a truly Reformed man whom to throw out of the church communion cries to heaven. Of course, there are differences! Do all the ministers in your churches think alike on all dogmas? You know they do not! Follow the path you have begun to tread and you will end up with peace, but it will be the peace of the graveyard, where no one disagrees with no one. They are alike still, but it is the stillness of death. The end of the pathway you have followed in 1942-1946 is the path that will surely end with Roman Catholicism where there is but one voice of authority: the Pope."

"... Rev. Hoeksema took a heavy step? Prof. Schilder felt strange on our pulpits? I wish that you could have *seen* our communion, could have attended our conferences, could have heard the words that were spoken on both sides which spoke of warmth, of love, of trust, of appreciation. And all this in the knowledge that we differ on some points. What of it? No one has all the truth. And we will learn one from the other." (Rev. G. Vos, *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 24, p. 150).

Would to God that our last Synod had been thus minded, it would have kept them from making the error of building our denominational wall so high and narrow, that within them there is room only for those that subscribe to a certain covenant view to the exclusion of all others. Such action must necessarily lead to dissension and schism.

Finally, I object to the 'Declaration of Principles' because the questions involved in this controversy are of such a nature that they are either extra-confessional or at least debatable, and therefore may not determine membership or non-membership in the Church of Christ. I do not believe that we as churches may demand agreement with the proposed 'Declaration of Principles' as a requisite for membership in our Protestant Reformed Churches. Yet, that seems to be the purpose of our last Synod in adopting these declarations. That this is evidently the purpose is especially evident from the fact that this declaration was drawn up in answer to a request from the Mission Committee for a formal letter to be signed by all those who desire to be organized into a Protestant Reformed Church. I am convinced that if we as churches would adopt these declarations then all further discussions on these questions would be smothered, and our denominational wall would be built too high and narrow. To my mind the issues involved are matters for discussion by a theological conference rather than grounds to deny membership in our churches. I recall a statement made by the Rev. H. Hoeksema in re the Clark controversy of a few years ago in the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches. In my opinion the issues involved in that controversy were just as fundamental as the issues between us and our brethren of the 'Liberated' churches of the Netherlands and Canada, and yet, in the *Standard Bearer* of May 15, 1945 the Rev. Hoeksema

stated the following: "After reading the above report we are still of the opinion that the issues involved in the Clark controversy are matters for discussion by a theological conference rather than grounds of complaint against the licensure and ordination of a candidate for the ministry." If this be true, then I ask in all earnestness, how can the issues involved in our controversy with the 'Liberated' brethren, be grounds for denying membership in the church of Christ to these brethren and sisters in the Lord?

B. Kok.



## Unnecessary And Necessary Things

With this heading I refer to many discussions found in our circles of late about "conditions". For a time I hesitated writing about the issue because it has at present somewhat "died down". However, the matter is by no means settled. Therefore I at this time want to write what I find in my general observation of things. In doing so I will quote a few different sayings by different writers, and try to remain just as objective as possible. All of these quotations have been mentioned before in these discussions in our periodicals, but I will repeat doing so to serve as a basis for my deductions.

First of all I will quote a few words of Rev. Ophoff, written in Vol. 2 of the *Standard Bearer*, p. 47. There Rev. Ophoff is writing about Prof. Berkhof's pelagianism. Having quoted the professor about believing in the crucified Christ he writes: "The above quotation asserts that he who denies (but we do not deny) that the *conditional* (underscoring, J. B.) promise should be proclaimed unto all without distinction believes in the free will of man." Further, "Berkhof gives his readers to understand that we deny that the conditional promise to the effect that all who believe will be saved should be declared without distinction. This is the first lie. We do not deny this. We maintain, most emphatically, that the conditional promise should be declared unto all without distinction." Now I readily believe that Rev. Ophoff would not write that way today. Today he most likely would speak of a particular promise that must be preached to all, substituting the word particular for conditional. Of course, this would mean that he changed in use of words. But let that be as it is. Even with the preaching of a particular promise he still will not deny, I'm sure, the truths he expressed at that time. The general truth expressed is that the preaching is general, but the content of the preaching is particular. Further that only those who believe are saved. This we all believe. Regarding salvation itself this naturally im-

plies that man must believe. Without it salvation is impossible. Or to express it in other words: if one does not believe the Word preached he cannot and shall not be saved. Which reformed person would deny this?

Then in one of the articles of Concordia Rev. Petter quotes Rev. H. Hoeksema. Of the *many* quotations given one reads, and I'm quoting now as Rev. H. Hoeksema *restates* his interpretation of faith and justification in the Standard Bearer of Feb. 1, 1950, p. 198: "And secondly, although it is true that justification in the objective sense is contingent upon faith, we must never forget that faith is not of ourselves, it is a gift of God. It is therefore not a condition which we must fulfill in order to be justified: God Himself fulfills all the conditions of salvation". In the context Rev. Hoeksema speaks of justification in the objective sense, stating that in that sense God's people are justified even before they believe, also that in the blood of Christ the elect have been justified, in fact they have been justified in Christ from eternity. But in further speaking about our subjective justification, i.e. the consciousness of this justification, he says that this is contingent upon faith. Now what does this mean? That man must do something of himself to receive this? Never! That it is a condition man must fulfill of himself? Again, never! But this, that only when the christian believes and by faith clings to Christ will he be conscious of this and possess that personal assurance. This naturally implies, negatively, that if he doesn't do this he will not enjoy that assurance. Hence, the personal admonition here is that we must, as christians, live in faith, have a seeking and active faith. Other interpretation I cannot give to these words.

Next. In the May 11, '50 issue of Concordia Rev. Petter refers for the second time to an article of Rev. H. Veldman in which Rev. Veldman quotes from Prof. Berkhof's theology. See Standard Bearer, March 1, '48, pp. 247b and 248a. Thereupon Rev. H. Veldman answers Rev. Petter in the June 15, '50 issue of the Standard Bearer, pp. 412, 413. First of all he again quotes his own comments on Prof. Berkhof, made the first time: "It is surely true that the surety of Jesus Christ is basis for God's fellowship with us, that the justice of the Lord must be satisfied before we can again be received into Divine favour (Lord's Day 5). And it is actually true that to enjoy experientially, experientially, consciously the blessings of the covenant, we must consciously enter into the covenant of faith. But does this give us the right to speak of the covenant in a conditional sense: Faith itself is a gift of God. And we surely agree with the last sentence of the above quotation: "Both are conditions, however, *within* (underscoring H. V.) the covenant". Further, "Are not the conditions of the professor in this quotation the requirements which are absolutely necessary shall the Christian receive and enjoy the salvation

of God, such as, e.g. the suretyship of Jesus Christ, the perfect satisfaction of the Mediator, the act of believing, which act of believing is a gift of God? This explains why I underscore the words: '*within* the covenant', in the expressions: Both are conditions, however, within the covenant". From these words it is very plain that Rev. H. Veldman also believes that only when Christians believe will they enjoy the salvation of God. Hence, if the Christian does not believe or live in faith he will not receive that enjoyment. This certainly implies that the Christian must do something. Again, who of us does not believe that this is possible only by the grace of God. All of us do. And this Rev. H. Veldman calls a condition *within* the covenant.

Now Rev. Petter. Is he a Pelagian and therefore a heretic? Of this he has been accused. He believes in conditions, does he not? Does he deny the fundamental truths of Reformed or Prot. Ref. doctrine? I haven't found it in any of his writings. Does he deny unconditional predestination, total depravity, etc.? Does he believe in Arminianism or Pelagianism? Is anyone of our ministers guilty of these things? Not that I know of. I do agree with Rev. Doezeema that Rev. Petter could have emphasized these a little more at different times to prevent any possible suspicion that he does not agree with some of them. But this does not mean that he disagrees with them. Far from it. Many of our ministers have made big sacrifices for our Protestant Reformed truth in the past. Their struggles have often been many, including financial ones. Wonder why? Because they love our churches and our truth. Just a few days ago I received the December issue of Beacon Lights. In it the editor writes about our present day situations. And he makes sweeping statements. He writes that the very foundations of our churches are in danger of being uprooted. He also speaks of distortion of our truth. Further, that we are in great danger of losing our precious heritage. Again I say, these are indeed sweeping statements. But naturally we look for positive proof in future issues. After all impressions are no proof, only facts. And I for one, on the basis of my own convictions, do not believe that such is true. And I thank God that such isn't the case.

But, to come back to Rev. Petter's writings, let us take notice of some of the things he wrote in the recent past. Naturally, it is quite impossible for me to go into detail, but I will quote him in as far as it is necessary to present his views.

First of all he says that there are no conditions *for* the covenant. Concordia, March 31, '49. He restates this in the March 30 issue of 1950, and in other places. What does he mean by this? This, that as far as entering into the covenant is concerned there are no conditions. It is simply unconditional, wholly



the work of God's grace according to His eternal election. Becoming a christian is one hundred percent the work of the Lord. But he does believe in conditions *in* the covenant. See the same issues. What does he mean by this? That, after we have become children of God, we must do something of ourselves? Or that the perseverance of the christian is dependent upon his own free will? Not at all. Let me quote him from these issues: "Now we do not mean that after the Lord has begun the process and carried it to this point of consciousness, man as it were takes it up and carries it to its completion. Indeed not. Salvation is the work of God from beginning to end. Sanctification and preservation are His as well as expiation and regeneration. The power to believe is wrought by the Lord. And so is the power to walk in sanctification and perseverance. But in these the creature partakes and acts consciously so that it becomes his act. He believes, he sanctifies himself, he perseveres, appropriates the blessings of salvation." But doesn't Rev. Petter speak of faith being a condition? He does, but again, the question is what does he mean? Then he has reference to the activity of faith. He means to say that man, as a christian, for we are speaking here about regenerated children of God, must live in faith, seek, repent, confess and trust in Christ. These are acts of the creature, as a moral, rational being, wrought by God in him. And only when the christian so lives does he grow in salvation and ever more experiences the same. And what if he doesn't do this? Then he fails to experience these blessings. Let me quote some more. Concordia, April 13, '50: "And now in that one picture God acts, and man acts. God works in us the willing and the doing. He does not only work the ability to will and do, but He works the willing and the doing itself. And we work this salvation (*katergein*, Calvin: *perficere, ad finem perducere*). So there is nothing here which God does not energize. And yet we do not only do this that is said here, (*katergein*) but we are also exhorted to do it, we do it as our own act, as deed of willing and doing." To me this is very plain. The christian acts, does something. He is a rational, moral being. But his very acting is the power of God within him. Now this requirement of acting, i.e. of active faith he calls a condition. Before the mind of the christian this stands out: If I do not so live I will not experience the blessings of our covenant God. So I understand Rev. Petter, both from his writings and personal conversations with him.

Notice now that the *concept* or *idea* expressed in the writings of all four men is identical. If I am wrong in drawing this conclusion I stand to be corrected. But who will deny the truth expressed in them? Isn't it always true that as children of God we experience His blessings only when we by an active faith seek, serve and trust in Him? And isn't it also

true that the christian at all times is conscious of the fact that if he does not do such things (which he can do only by the grace of God) he will not taste the Lord's blessings. If this isn't true then I have never yet preached the full Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible contains any number of examples of this concept.

But why is Rev. Petter (and possibly also Rev. Doezeema by this time) called unreformed. In our circles he has been accused of being Pelagian, unreformed, and even a heretic. But why? Because he uses the term condition to express this concept. Rev. H. Hoeksema and others use the term: in the way of. God saves His people in the way of their believing, seeking and trusting. But Rev. Petter thinks that this expression does not do justice to the idea, and that Scripture in different places definitely presents these truths in such a conditional form. Writes he, in Concordia, January 19, '50: "And we must not lose this point in the Bible by saying that the idea of command, or requirement, or demand, or of way (in the way of, I presume, J. B.) expresses and fully covers the Biblical idea. These words do not. The idea in the Bible in many connections is that of conditionality. It is purposely expressed that way by the Holy Spirit in the Bible. And we may not try to get rid of this because of some prepossession." So the difference in all the discussions finally narrows down to that of a word or of terminology. As far as the concept is concerned there is no difference, at least not as far as I can see. And because one uses the word conditions, in this sense, he is necessarily unreformed. With this I do not agree. I consider so much of the discussion we've been having unnecessary. Often the discussions centered around the concept, Petter being accused of many things, while it should be centered only around the word. To my mind big issues have been made unnecessarily. If some want to discuss the term, that, of course, is their privilege, but let it be limited only to the term.

Two things I surely fail to understand. In the first place that the exponents of the term condition are already branded as being unreformed. Who can rightly call a man unreformed and a heretic? Only Synod, of course. And only when Synod does such do we have the right of the use of such language. Secondly, if the accusers of these exponents are so convinced of their heresy why don't they approach their respective consistories? That surely is the church-political way.

But what is necessary? I would say, abundance of love. No, that doesn't mean that we have to sacrifice an ounce of principle, but it does mean that principle without love means nothing. I Cor. 13. Who does not want to keep the truth the Lord has given us? All of us do, I'm sure. It is dear to our hearts. But let us labor in love, discuss in love and always assume

attitudes of love. Let us be very careful that Satan will not get an advantage of us. The sins of our old man so easily become predominant. Love is the way. Love is humility, patient and meek. Love seeks the spiritual welfare of the brethren. Love defends and promotes as much as possible the honor and good character of our neighbor and brother. Love bears up with each other's weaknesses. Let's wash one another feet. Now of all times it is expedient that we be calm and collective. Surely in the times in which we are living, the last days. The devil would have a great pleasure in literally tearing our churches apart. Never should we be hasty in actions or in drawing conclusions. Where there is love the Lord commands His blessings. . . .and there only.

J. Blankespoor.



## What Is The Truth?

With interest the undersigned has read and reflected upon the various articles which have appeared in our church papers. This, of course, is particularly applicable to that which is being written about our church labors in Canada. As consistory member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hamilton, I think I can say, in all modesty, to be acquainted with the missionary activity among the Holland immigrants, and particularly with that activity in an established church, consisting primarily of members of the Liberated Churches of the Netherlands.

When Rev. A. Cammenga expressed himself in the Concordia numbers of July 20 and August 17 in connection with the difficulties of the labor among the immigrants I understood him fully and sympathized with him with all my heart. And when he promised us in the August 17 number of Concordia, and I quote: "Other difficulties in the Canadian field we hope to consider in a future article," I looked forward with much interest to this article in which he intended to consider these other difficulties. In the meantime Rev. Cammenga visited us in Hamilton. I talked with him and said to him that I had noticed in his Concordia articles that he had encountered difficulties with the Liberated immigrants, and that I looked forward with interest to his following article, also with a view to the labor and conditions in the congregation of Hamilton.

This promised article has until now not appeared. Now, however, there appears in the Standard Bearer of December 1, and to my utter amazement, an article by the Revs. Cammenga and Hofman, entitled: "Among the Immigrants," which emits an entirely different sound. I wish to ask our readers to compare this

article in the Standard Bearer with the articles of the Rev. Cammenga in the Concordia numbers of July 20 and August 17. I quote the following from the article in Concordia of July 20: "Secondly, although the Holland immigrant in general is far better informed with respect to Reformed doctrine than the average Christian Reformed member in the States, yet in contacting the Reformed immigrant it is very evident that the members of the churches of the Reformed faith in the Netherlands have also suffered from the spirit of our day so that definite signs of error are horribly noticeable. Among them, too, the old stern, tried and true Reformed faith is gone, and their living out of the principle of the Church of Christ and living for the Church has well-nigh disappeared. Thirdly the spirit of hatred and antagonism toward us, so pronounced in the States, is painfully evident in Canada as well. Where and by whom this spirit was "pumped" into them is not known to us, but that it was done is unquestionable. To them, whether they have never seen or heard any of us personally, nor have ever done so much as having read some of our literature—to them we are schismatics; a church, or rather a sect, with a very strange and never-heard-of-doctrine. To them we are a church with a gospel that knows of no responsibility of man, with a message only for the elect."—end of quote. One can hardly deny that the language in this Concordia surely emits an entirely different sound than that which characterizes the recent article in the Standard Bearer of December 1.

I wish to ask Rev. Cammenga: Why the change? How do you account for the difference in your articles of last summer and the recent one in the Standard Bearer? Have you discerned of late among the immigrants in Canada any change for the better? To the contrary, I am of the conviction that the last months have taught us differently. Of course, I am speaking especially of Hamilton.

Why are not the brethren and sisters of our Protestant Reformed Churches correctly informed about the labor in Canada? They are surely the ones who, with their financial contributions, make the labor of Rev. Cammenga and Rev. Hofman among the immigrants possible, and they are the ones who have already brought several sacrifices for that work in Canada. Why, then, are they not being informed according to the truth?

Upon reading this article one may possibly ask the question whether I am personally against this work in Canada. And then I must answer that I cannot be sufficiently thankful that I at present belong to our Protestant Reformed Churches, that we may hear the purely Reformed preaching again, and that the pure administration of God's Word may once more be proclaimed from the pulpit. However, I consider it my holy calling to seek for that church the good. This,

and this alone, prompts this writing. And if we do mission work and would organize new congregations at the cost of our Protestant Reformed truth, then I would say to the brothers and sisters: "Is that the reason why you have stood firm for the truth since 1924? Hold fast that which ye have, that no man may take your crown."

Now to return to the article in the Standard Bearer of December 1. First we would quote the following, which we may read on page 116, second column, in the second paragraph: "It is encouraging that we can testify of one another that we love the Truth and bow before the Word of God. This latter, we have experienced time and again amongst them. Even though it seems at times that they must re-state their position and forsake the contentions of some of their 'leaders', they are willing to be led by the Scriptures. And that they are fundamentally Reformed and that there should be room for them in our fellowship, we are convinced."

This statement by our missionaries amazes me. Surely, this does not apply to Hamilton. It is simply a riddle to us how anyone can write that they "are willing to forsake the contentions of some of their 'leaders' and are willing to be led by the Scriptures." The undersigned would like to know to what extent the immigrants here are in constant contact with the Netherlands and are being led by their leaders in the Netherlands. But, of greater significance is the latter part of this quotation of the article in the Standard Bearer. Had our missionaries written that they should be given room in our churches if they agree to be instructed in our truth and promise not to agitate, the undersigned would have no objection. However, it seems to me that that lies in the very nature of the case. But I cannot possibly conclude that from this article. Of course, I stand to be corrected. But, I have understood this statement in the December 1 article to mean that because they are fundamentally Reformed there should be room for them in our fellowship. Revs. Cammenga and Hofman, is a man fundamentally Reformed when he believes in the Heynsian conception of the covenant and the promise? Is a person fundamentally Reformed when he believes that God loves all the children who are baptized and would save them all? Is a person fundamentally Reformed when he declares that Christ died for all, or that Christ at least merited the chance of salvation for all? Are these people fundamentally Reformed and should there be room for them in our fellowship?

And, in the second place, I quote the following from the December 1 article in the Standard Bearer, page 117, second column, second paragraph: "Yet, after hearing our preaching, they recognized what they wanted. And even though all their questions may not have been immediately answered, they expressed their willingness to receive that preaching and their desire

to be instructed by us, in seeking membership with us."—end of quote.

Again, we have read in all amazement. We understand this paragraph to mean that these immigrants have expressed the willingness to receive our preaching, and also, in seeking membership with us, to be instructed by us. And later, on page 118, toward the close of the first paragraph, we read the same sentiments: "In other words, they should not expect to find or be able to transplant their Church to this country, but must join themselves to the True Church as God has established and conditioned it *here*. We also believe that that is their desire. And that Church here bears the name: Protestant Reformed!" Please note from this latter quotation that it is the desire of these immigrants to join themselves to the True Church of God, that that True Church of God here is the Protestant Reformed Church, that they do not expect to transplant their Church to this country, but desire to join the Protestant Reformed Churches, for the sake of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

What an amazing statement! I would like to ask our missionaries: Brethren, where do you find such immigrants? I must still meet them. Permit me to inform our readers that this is exactly what the consistory of the Protestant Reformed Church at Hamilton has rejected. The point is exactly that they have refused to be a Protestant Reformed Church, but have simply decided to open the church doors to all the Liberated immigrants from the Netherlands. The point is that this is exactly the reason why the congregation at Hamilton is about to disappear as a Protestant Reformed Church unless something unforeseen happens. The point is that the Church here has put the Liberated immigrants of the Netherlands above the Church whose name she bears.

I feel that it is my duty to acquaint our readers with these facts, and call the attention to the article of the Revs. Cammenga and Hofman with which I cannot possibly agree. As Protestant Reformed Churches we must be peculiar. If therein we fail we have lost all right of existence. For the sake of the truth of God's unconditional, sovereignly particular grace and promise we exist today. And only as long as we watch over this truth shall we continue to exist.

S. Reitsma  
Hamilton, Ont.

#### I THANK THEE

For all Thy blessings, Lord, to me;  
For all I am and still may be;  
For all the promise in God's Word;  
For His message I have heard,  
I am thankful.

## The Rest Of Brother Ten Elshof's Article

I have not yet done with the article of George Ten Elshof (The Standard Bearer for December 1). In my previous writing I dealt with the brother's statement that reads: "I ask in all seriousness and sobriety surely if we need a declaration we have needed one for years which according to form and content refute the error of common grace and related deviations."

Let us now examine the rest of the brother's article. Referring to the immigrants in Canada, he writes that "now we find ourselves placed before the beautiful and to us almost unusually delightful privilege of bringing our truth, not to those by whom we are constantly rejected, but rather to those who are ready and who have been prepared and placed exactly at that place and in those circumstances to listen to us with an attentive ear."

And what is our reaction supposed to be? This, according to Ten Elshof: "We spew out our disgust when we find that the Lord's field is in need of a bit of cultivation in order to remove what appears to be weeds growing among the rows of sturdy corn." He continues: "It is not for nothing that the figure of the husbandman is used in Scripture. Does the tenant-farmer turn to the landlord and say, 'I cannot work your field for I find weeds there, yea, even thorns and thistles. My back is sore, my hands are blistered from years of hoeing and weeding in that other field to which you assigned me'."

By this imagery we, who urge the adoption of the "New Declaration", are pictured as being furiously angry with God (we spew out our disgust) because He sends us to proclaim the Gospel to the Canadian immigrants. We rebel at the sight of the weeds of error in the thinking of these people. It calls for some hoeing. And we are sick and tired of hoeing. We have had enough of that sort of thing. Such, according to the brother, is our attitude. But he is mistaken. We are only too eager to instruct these people in the true doctrine that their minds may be freed from the weeds of error by which the growth of their spiritual life is being stunted,—eager that they join us in confessing before men the pure Gospel. But barring exceptions, these people will not be instructed and they insist on corrupting our churches by propagating their errors in our communion. Certainly, we must labor with them. But we may not take them under our ecclesiastical roof so long as they will not allow themselves to be bound by what we believe to be the truth of the Confessions. To exclude these people until they are able to change their mind and attitude, we as churches must have the "Declaration". And therefore

I urge its adoption. Certainly, the brother must know that the picture of us that he hangs before men is a horrible misrepresentation.

The brother of course is not one of those who spew out their disgust when they find that the Lord's field is in the need of a bit of cultivation for the removal of what appear to be weeds growing among the corn. He loves the field and desires that it be weeded. But why then does he urge the rejection of the "New Declaration"? That "Declaration" is the hoe for weeding the field. Can we weed without a hoe? Can we weed without the preaching of the Word, the pure Gospel? Or is the doctrine of the "New Declaration" not the pure Gospel of God? Is it not the Gospel of our Confessions? If so, why then does not some one in our midst try to make this plain?

The point that the brother means to drive home by his illustration of the cannibals is that a declaration would not cause such savages to stop devouring strangers, and that therefore it should be plain to all that, to quote his own words, "the multiplicity of situations and circumstances (of life) can never be covered by a mass production factory"?

But the brother is sorely mistaken. If the declaration were the true gospel, it would have precisely that effect on as many such heathen as it pleased the Lord to save by it. As converted cannibals they surely would not stew and consume their fellow humans anymore.

The brother also thinks that, quoting again his own words, "it is a sign of weakness in the church when she finds it necessary to add to the Confessions." But the sign of weakness is not adding to or interpreting the Confessions, but corrupting them as did the Christian Reformed Churches in '24. Adding to the confessions or interpreting them, when necessary, is indicative of great spiritual strength, of sustained ability and courage on the part of the church to vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors.

The brother also asks: "Has not the legislation concerning worldly amusements, union membership, censored books, etc. etc. been a miserable failure?" We may reply that if the "legislation" is of Christ, the sole legislator of the church,—if, accordingly, its source is God's Scriptures, it is not a failure. For the Scriptures cannot be a failure ever. Hardening or softening as God wills, they are a success always. We are the miserable failures—we, who in our carnality refuse to be bound by Christ's legislation concerning worldly amusements, etc. etc.

We agree with the brother that, to quote his own words, "the adherence to sound doctrine and the observance of proper deportment must spring forth from a sanctified heart which humbly bows before the Word and is subservient to it; and that it cannot be accomplished by a superimposition of declarations." This is

indeed true. It is just another way of saying that if there be not grace in the heart, the declaration, if it sets forth the true Gospel, is a savor of death unto death in every such case. But must for this reason the declaration be rejected? If so, then for this very and same reason we are obliged to repudiate all our Christian creeds and with them the Scriptures.

In the lines last quoted occurs the expression, "by a superimposition of declarations". In our communion declarations are not of course superimposed. Our synods are not hierarchs.

In closing the brother bids us to gaze at the church of Rome "for the classic example of declarations." He exclaims: "Count, if you can, her papal bulls and edicts and behold also a vast multitude who now bow before their declarations rather than before the Word!"

It is true what the brother says. Rome's bulls are numerous. But were their content derived from the Scriptures, I and we all would have to subscribe them even to the last bull. And the multitude of course should bow only before the Scriptures and not before declarations in conflict with the Scriptures. And this brings us finally to the real issue in dispute among us. It is this: Is the subject matter of the "New Declaration" the very doctrine of the Scriptures and the Confessions. If so, we as churches are in duty bound before God to subscribe and adopt it. Would that the brother had concentrated on the real issue.

Some concluding remarks.

The brother is strongly opposed to "declarations". Can he explain the *essential* difference between a "declaration" and a "sermon" on the text of the Scriptures? He cannot explain the difference, for there is none. Both set forth what their authors believe to be the truth of God's Word. Yet, though the brother listens to two sermons every Sabbath and as a christian man must and does allow himself to be bound by them, if his heart tells him that what he hears is the Word of God, he repudiates the "Declaration" and urges the churches to do likewise, though his heart must be telling him that it too is the word of God. I don't understand.

Frequently I hear also this reasoning: If the "New Declaration" is as to its subject matter the Confessions, we continue to hold the truth even as rejecters of the "Declaration". For we have and retain the truth in our Confessions. So, what need have we of the "Declaration". No need whatever.

But this reasoning won't do either. This ought to be clear. If John and Henry are one and the same human, it is not possible to make away with John while saving alive Henry. No more is it possible to hold to the Confessions, while repudiating the "Declaration". For as to their subject matter, they are one and the same. (No one as yet has proved the contrary). Hence, rejecting the "New Declaration" we reject our Confes-

sion. Thus rejecting the "Declaration" we reject what we believe to be the truth of God's very Word. But the truth will abide, though as churches we repudiate it—abide even in our hearts and consciousnesses only now to condemn us for denying it. Let us take heed to ourselves what we do with the "New Declaration".

G. M. Ophoff.

## Rev. Petter's Fifth Instalment

In the "Concordia" for December 7 Rev. Petter makes a beginning of treating the "New Declaration". That as such is gratifying. It is a thing to which we have been looking forward for some time now. Rev. Petter criticizes the "Declaration"; he raises objections to it. That of course is his right. But the right may not be abused. The criticism must be true and just and the objections real. Let us get before us the criticism that Rev. Petter brings to bear on the "Declaration". He writes:

"And now when I finally begin to discuss, or criticize the Declaration I will state that I have objections to it from exactly the above viewpoint, namely, of speaking the truth in love. I have objections both to its origination and its contents; and I hold that it does not advance the truth and the unity of the church, neither as regards our relation to the Liberated, nor as regards our relation among ourselves as members of one church. I maintain that it is confusing, obstructive, devisive."

The charges are these:

- 1) The "New Declaration" does not speak the truth in love.
- 2) Its origination causes brow-raising. (in the sequel of his article).
- 3) It does not advance the truth.
- 4) It does not advance the unity of the church.
- 5) It is confusing, obstructive, devisive.

Rev. Petter has much fault to find with the "Declaration". But it is clear that he is not facing the real issue regarding it, which is: Is the "Declaration" as to its subject matter the true Gospel of the Confessions. If so, Rev. Petter's most serious criticism of it automatically falls by the board. For certainly, if the "Declaration" as to its subject matter is the true gospel of the "Confessions" it necessarily advances, as preached by Christ and proclaimed by His servants, the truth and the true church. For this is always the effect of the Gospel preaching. And if the "Declaration" is the true Gospel of the Confessions, it also obstructs and divides. For the true Gospel does so. As preached by Christ, it excludes the children of darkness and causes



divisions between believers and unbelievers. Rev. Petter should concentrate on the issue.

But it is also conceivable of course that the "Declaration" obstructs and divides because, due to its faulty composition, it equivocates, emits an uncertain sound. Rev. Petter better tell us what he means.

Rev. Petter, of course, is obliged to prove all his charges. I say this with emphasis because he bypasses the first. Not proving also this charge will reveal that his sole purpose in treating the "Declaration" is not to speak the truth about it but to bring it under a cloud, to discredit it in the eyes of the readers of the "Concordia".

As God only knows the heart it follows that to prove this charge Rev. Petter must show that as to the *form of its words* the "Declaration" is loveless, bitter, hateful, and thus bespeaks hatred in the hearts of its authors.

And to prove his second charge Rev. Petter must show by producing all the evidence that the "Declaration" was brought into being by acts of deceit both on the part of the committee of pre-advice and on the part of synod by whom the "Declaration" was tentatively adopted and who advised the churches to make a study of it with a view to its permanent adoption (or rejection) on the coming synod.

To prove that the "Declaration" does not advance the truth and the unity of the church, is obstructive and devisive Rev. Petter must show either that as to its composition it is hopelessly confusing or that as to its subject matter it is not the Confessions but an addition to it and then, should he succeed in this, that as taken by itself it is heretical. Of course, if the "Declaration" is heretical it is not as to its subject matter the Confessions. So Rev. Petter should begin trying to show that the "Declaration" is heretical.

Finally, to prove that the "Declaration" is confusing Rev. Petter must show that, because of its faulty composition, it is ambiguous and equivocating.

The grounds on which the "Declaration" may not be rejected.

1) If the "Declaration" is as to its subject matter the Confessions, it may not be rejected on the grounds that it is offensive to some people or that it excludes Christian immigrants who will not allow themselves to be instructed in its doctrine or that as adopted it would be binding. For this would be equivalent to rejecting the *Confessions* on the grounds that they are offensive to some people or exclude Canadian immigrants, or that they are binding. Of course the *Confessions* are binding. We as office-bearers subscribe them, don't we; and thereby we promised "diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing. Moreover we declared by our subscription that we re-

ject all errors that militate against this doctrine and particularly those that were condemned by the above-mentioned synod (of Dort), but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors." (See Formula of Subscription).

2) If the "Declaration" as to its subject matter is the Confessions it may not be rejected on the grounds that it is obstructive and devisive. For this would be equivalent to rejecting the Confessions on the grounds that they are obstructive and devisive, which of course they are, as has just been explained.

3) If the "Declaration" as to its subject matter is the Confessions it may not be rejected on the grounds that it does not advance the truth and the church. For this would be equivalent to rejecting the *Confessions* on the ground that *they* do not advance the truth and the church. And certainly, being as to *their* subject matter the Scriptures they do advance the truth and the church.

Thus it is plain what constitutes the issue in our dispute.

1) The issue is not whether the "Declaration" is offensive to and excludes Canadian immigrants who will not be instructed in its doctrine. This can have nothing to do with the issue.

2) The issue is not whether Rev. Petter is Reformed. No one has said that he isn't. But this can have nothing to do with the issue.

3) The issue is not whether Rev. J. D. de Jong had a pleasant trip. We believe he did. But this is not the issue.

4) The issue is not whether there was a time when we imagined that the Liberated churches and the Protestant Reformed churches could be sister churches.

5) The issue is not whether Prof. Schilder is a very learned man. I believe he is. But this is not the issue.

6) The issue is not whether Rev. Petter is so profound in his writings that we mortals of ordinary mold do not grasp the man.

7. The issue is not whether 90 percent of our people hold with Rev. Petter.

8) The issue is not whether 22 years ago I a few times employed the kind of terminology the use of which I now condemn. I admitted that I did. But this can have nothing to do with the issue.

9) The issue is not whether the Protestant Reformed and the Liberated mean the same thing but that the trouble is that each group expresses itself differently. This can have nothing to do with the issue.

The issue in this present controversy is this: Is the "Declaration" as to its subject matter the Confessions.

Let us by all means concentrate on the issue. Let us first settle this issue. Having settled the issue, we

may take up for discussion as many of these other matters as we think it worth our while.

Finally, the ground on which the "Declaration" may be rejected is that as to its subject matter it is not the Confessions.

There is also the question whether the adoption of the "Declaration" may be postponed say for a year. It may not be done. Allow me to state the reason. Let us once more get before us the doctrine of the "Declaration". It is this: The promise of God is an unconditional and unfailing oath bequeathing salvation only upon the elect and assuring it to them alone. It was as moved by the conviction that this doctrine is the Gospel of the Confession and the Scriptures that we chose being expelled from the fellowship of the Christian Reformed Churches rather than sign the Three Points. By signing these points we would have denied this doctrine. As moved by this same conviction we have been preaching this doctrine from our pulpits through all the years of our existence as churches. Think what it would mean should we on the coming synod declare the doctrine of the "Declaration" not to be the doctrine of the "Confession and the Scriptures" and on that ground deny it. We would thereby pronounce our conviction false, and accordingly our refusal to subscribe the Three Points a mistake, and our separate existence as churches pointless.

But certainly our firm belief still is that the doctrine of the "Declaration" is the Gospel of the Confessions and the Scriptures. Such being our conviction, how can we postpone adopting the "Declaration" in order to give the Liberated time to make up their minds about it? It may not be done. For to postpone adopting the "Declaration" for that purpose, we as churches on our synod put a question mark not only behind the "Declaration" but behind the Confession and the very Scriptures as well. For our conviction is that the doctrine of the "Declaration" is the Gospel of the Confession and the Scriptures.

This is as plain as can be. As churches we may not certainly on our next synod decide to postpone adopting the "Declaration" and then in the same breath declare that as to its subject matter it is the confession. Doing the latter we are morally obliged to adopt the "Declaration" at once without delay. The only way in which we can free ourselves from this responsibility before the eyes of the world is officially to refrain from declaring the "Declaration" to be the Confession as to its subject matter. But doing the latter we officially put a question mark behind it. This can't be helped.

But our conviction being what it is, how can it be right for us to put a question mark behind the "Declaration". How, in other words, can it be right for us to *postpone* its adoption even, our conviction being what it is. It cannot be right. G. M. Offhoff.

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## IN HIS FEAR

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### A Healthy Attitude

As we pointed out in our last article, it is our intention in these present articles to underscore the fact that the present controversy, as it has now rather centered about the *Declaration of Principles*, must be viewed and treated in the *fear of the Lord*. In that connection we called attention in the last issue to certain "pseudo-arguments" which are used and of which as people of God we must beware as we take a stand and maintain the position that we take. In the present article we will call attention to some dangerous attitudes which are assumed or could be assumed in regard to the controversy, in the hope that also in this respect "forewarned is fore-armed."

We would emphasize, however, once again before we proceed, that it is not our intention to enter into the contents of the controversy as such in these articles. We say this not because we personally are in a "neutral corner". We are not. We take our stand without any question on the side of the truth as it is maintained in the Declaration on the basis of our Reformed Confessions and also maintain that the declaration of that truth, far from being obstructive or schismatic, is at this stage of our history highly necessary and salutary for our churches in view of recent developments both at home and on the mission field. But the arguments as such, pro and con, do not belong in this rubric, but to the editorial department. And we leave them to our editor gladly. We merely here recognize the fact that the proposed Declaration as well as the truth contained in it have been and are being opposed: there is a controversy. Arguments are being made back and forth. And our churches, all our people, are faced by that controversy. They must weigh the arguments, and they must needs assume certain definite attitudes. And we urge that this must be done in the fear of the Lord. And hence we here call attention to some wrong attitudes with which one comes into contact.

#### *I Don't Care.*

Surprising as it may seem, this attitude is taken by some. It isn't expressed in so many words. Who would do that? But the attitude is there nevertheless. It is really the attitude of those who don't know in the least what is going on these days. They never talk about the matters at hand. They wouldn't know where to begin talking about them. They don't know what matters are the subject of discussion. They don't say, "I don't care," but they act it. They probably don't read either the *Standard Bearer* or *Concordia*. If the

subject is broached in the pulpit, they can't grasp it because they haven't kept themselves informed, haven't lived along. They really take the attitude expressed in the words, "I don't care."

Dangerous? That goes without saying.

If everyone took that attitude, the church would be so dead that there could no longer be any controversy. In fact, throughout church history it has been because there were those dead, inactive, uninformed, uninterested I-don't-care-ists that heresy has ever been able to raise its ugly head in the midst of the church. As long as the church is on its guard and alert and mindful of what is being said and written and actively concerned about it, false doctrine never stands a chance.

Watch, therefore!

#### *Anti-controversialists.*

The twin brother of I-don't-care-ism is anti-controversialism. Those who take this attitude insist that all controversy is distasteful, that we should not sully the pages of our periodicals with these "petty" differences, that no one is edified thereby. They want to leave these doctrinal differences to the private discussion of the clergy. And, with a view to those outside our circles, they don't want to hang our dirty wash on the line for all to see. Rather, do they emphasize, we should be positive, not call attention to the falsehood of the lie. They sometimes even go so far as to maintain that it has always been the trouble of the Protestant Reformed Churches that they have been controversial, troublesome, meddlesome, intolerant. We should seek unity, and should cooperate on what common ground we can find, forget the differences, both among ourselves and between us and other groups.

Now there is a certain twisted element of truth in this attitude which is very deceptive. In fact, usually these anti-controversialists make their position sound so deceptively pious and true that one is easily impressed by them as high-minded Christians. The element of truth is this, that controversy is distasteful to most of us, distasteful to our flesh. I refer, of course, to controversy not as fighting for the sake of a fight, but as striving for the maintenance of the truth of God's Word over against the philosophy of men. That true controversy is distasteful to our flesh. We don't want to fight that fight. That is why Scripture so frequently must warn us of the certainty that false doctrine shall arise in the church and must admonish us to be on our guard against heresy and to oppose the lie. In that connection, with a view to the present situation in our churches let us note:

1) That the controversy is there; it is a fact. To say that we must avoid it is to deny reality. And let us not try to take the spiritual attitude of the pro-

verbial ostrich, who blithely sticks his head in the sand and says he can't see any danger.

2) That the cause of that controversy is not the truth, but the appearance of the lie, the Heynsian error. And let us never forget that throughout the history of the church the truth and the maintenance of the truth has not been the cause of schism and dissension. That charge must be laid at the door of heresy. The truth is not a departure, and those who maintain the truth are not schismatic. But the lie is the departure, and those who insist on it over against the truth are the schismatics. If you forget that, you take away your own right of existence as sons of the Reformation. Or, to bring the matter closer home, you take away your right of existence as Protestant Reformed Churches.

3) That controversy should be public. The present controversy is public, of course. And it was brought into public by the public opposition of some to the Protestant Reformed truth. But that it is public is proper. I would not at all be in favor of limiting the present discussions, for example, to a private ministers' conference. Not because I want to see our churches torn by trouble, nor because I like to display our troubles for all to see, but because the matters involved concern the churches. And the churches are not the clergy, but all our congregations and the members thereof.

4) That when and since this controversy is public, everyone must take it as his duty to investigate it not only, but to determine where he stands. You can't be neutral. Nor can you view the whole matter as a sort of philosophical discussion. But because the truth as it is in Christ Jesus is involved, every member of the church must be vitally and intensely concerned. You can't sit by yawning, while the battle of the truth is being fought.

#### *Appeasers.*

It stands to reason that these appeasers are really of the same party as the anti-controversialists. They are those who insist that we must seek peace, that we must pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and that lament the present controversy because it is a breach of the peace.

In regard to this attitude, let it be said that we must beware that our peace-seeking is not pacifism. There must be no appeasement through compromise. The churches must beware of a Munich. In our seeking of peace, we must very consciously seek *peace*; and in our prayer for the peace of Jerusalem, we must very consciously pray for the peace of *Jerusalem*. Peace is after all the sweet consciousness that all is well with us before God. And it is only when we have that peace with God that we can have peace with one another and peace with all things. And remember:

God is a God of truth. There can be no peace with God as long as we hold a lie in our hand, no peace for us as churches and no peace for us as members of the church.

And so: by all means, seek peace. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. But do it with the confession: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

#### *Lack of Love?*

There is also the danger that we simply in a general and hazy way attribute all trouble to a lack of love, often to a lack of love on the part of those who sharply and clearly define and maintain the truth, sometimes to a lack of love on the part of both sides, and sometimes without any specification.

No one will deny that we must be motivated by the love of Christ in all that we do and say. But we must not make a general charge of this kind and then disgustedly turn away from this controversy. Nor should we sling that term *love of Christ* around loosely. Love is concrete. It is, in the first place, love of God in Christ to us. And therefore it is manifest in this that we love the God of our salvation in Christ. And the God of our salvation is the God of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Hence, the activity of love is also this, that we seek and maintain the truth, also among one another. And the activity of love is this, that we condemn all that is not in harmony with that truth, and that we do not hesitate to do that. That is the very necessary activity of love. Love is not a superficial sentiment that will tolerate any and every deviation from the path of truth. In respect to the truth love is very severe. It cannot function where there is the lie. It ferrets out the lie, condemns it, warns against it, points out the way of the truth. If then the accusation of a lack of the love of Christ is made, it must be specific, it must point out where and how that love is lacking, and it must do so on the basis of the Word of God. And let it be remembered that no deviation from the truth of the Word of God has ever yet had its root in the love of Christ.

And now I would like to sound a warning from the pages of church history. The pseudo-arguments of which I wrote last time, and the various attitudes to which I call attention in this article are nothing new in the history of the church. There has never been a time in all the ages of church history when they have not arisen. In fact, if we are mindful of our own history of 25 short years' duration, we cannot fail, surely, to note that all these arguments and different expressions of attitude have ominously familiar

ring. Has it not been exactly the opposition in all the history of our churches that tried to dull the sharp sword of the truth by calling the differences between us and our mother-church a matter of terms, or of a difference of emphasis? Have they not often pointed to the fact that we were a minority? Have they not often boasted in authorities? Have they not often clamored, "me too", in regard to being Reformed? Has not the breach of the peace often been lamented, with the sword of deposition in the hand? Has not the ostrich frequently put its head in the sand ecclesiastically? Has not the general and sentimental charge of a lack of love often been made?

History's page carries the clear warning to all who would walk in the fear of the Lord: Be careful! Be not deceived!

We must not be turned aside from the path of truth. We must be straight-forward, honest, clear, and concise in our arguments, and in our evaluation of them. We must above all else seek the truth, and must be guided by nothing else than a desire for the truth. We must stand concretely upon the basis of the Confessions and continue to maintain them without hesitation over against any and all who slip from that basis and cannot clearly point to any confessional ground in their views.

The fear of the Lord is concrete.

It is the way of truth.

H. C. Hoeksema.



## FROM HOLY WRIT

### Exposition Of Hebrews 10:19-25

#### VIII.

In this article we will continue our exposition of Hebrews 10:23. This verse reads as follows: "Let us hold fast the confession of the unwavering hope, for he that hath promised is faithful."

We wish to recall here to the reader, that in our former article, we called attention to two elements in the text. The first element, that we underscored in the above-named article is: the proper understanding of the term "the unwavering hope". We emphasized that this is not the hope in the subjective sense of the term merely, but that this is rather the objective hope in heaven, the realities in Christ as they shall be realized in the future and are the object of our joyful and ardent longing.

The second element to which we called attention is, that the confession here referred to, is not primarily

to be understood in the sense of the *act of confessing*, but that it refers to the *content* of the confession of the truth of the Gospel as it pertains to the final realization, and as this content is believed with the heart unto righteousness and is confessed with the mouth unto salvation. This, of course, does not mean that the actual confession is not important, nor does it mean that this element of actually confessing is not taught here in this beautiful Scripture passage.

The very contrary is true.

For the text teaches that we must "hold fast" to the confession of the hope. And such "holding fast" is undoubtedly an activity of faith and hope that works by love. There are some expositors, who feel that the more proper rendering of the verb in the Greek is: "keep on holding fast". Never let go until the final victory is won.

But, according to the text, "hold fast" we must.

What does this imply? This holding fast surely implies the here following elements, all of which we should keep in mind when presently we come to the question of the encouraging word "for He that has promised is faithful".

To "hold fast" implies, first of all, that there is a subject, a personal, moral-rational being that is addressed. It implies a *subject*, a person, who very really is the *subject*, the *doer* of the act and activity of the holding on. The subject here says: *I* must hold on, *I* do hold on. This we would remark against all sinful passivism, which is always tantamount to a refusal to walk in the ways of the elect, a trifling with the grace of election.

Secondly, we would notice, that "holding fast" is *not at all* an act of the natural, fallen man. He never can will to "hold fast" to the confession of the hope, but he "holds down" the truth in unrighteousness. Compare Canons of Dort, III, IV, Art. 4, and Romans 1:18-20. Nor is this ever an act that the elect performs as he is "by nature"; it never rises from the sinful nature, from the flesh. In our flesh there dwells no more good than in the natural man. The "holding fast" here spoken of in this text, even as in all similar passages, is only and solely an act of faith—in the faith that has its energizing power in the love of God, which is shed abroad in the hearts of the elect-believer through the Holy Spirit. It is the one believing, who, while *believing*, holds fast to the confession of the unwavering hope. And this faith resides in the spiritual center of the elect, that is, in their hearts whence are all the issues of life. And this faith that thus resides in the heart as a concrete, actual cheerful confidence and a certain knowledge is the *instrument*, the spirit-wrought *instrument*, that keeps us in communion with Christ and all of His benefits, both present and future. Compare: Belgic Confession, Art. 22. Such a hearty confidence and certain knowledge is not wrought in us

by the light of nature, nor by the Law of God, in both of which we only see our great misery and the knowledge of which can only cause our sin to multiply, but it is wrought in us through the preaching (per sermonem) which the Holy Spirit employs to work such faith in us.

Thirdly, to "hold fast" must *not be identified* with the act of God, (both in the beginning of the working of the new life in us and its continuance) whereby He works true conversion in the *elect*, and powerfully illumines *their* minds through the Holy Spirit, so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of God. Nor must this "holding fast" be *identified* with that "supernatural, most powerful and, at the same time, most delightful, astonishing, mysterious and ineffable work" of God, a work which is "not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead" as the inspired Scriptures declare, "so that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner are certainly infallibly and effectually regenerated, and *do actually believe*." The act of God in regeneration, calling and preservation may never be identified with the act of faith of the believers as they actually walk in good works by faith and do "hold fast" to the confession of the hope unwavering. For God is the subject, the Divine, infinite, all-wise, incomprehensible, uncreated Subject, Who works true conversion in the elect, giving us the energy of love to our will by the Holy Spirit and illumining the eyes of our hearts; but we, by virtue of this inworking, very really are the subject, be it then created, finite, yet we are very really the *subject* that *believes*. To deny this difference in subject is the error of all mystic-panteism, and, as I see it, of all "Existential-Theology". And, therefore, the exhortation to us that we "hold fast" the confession of our hope means what the fathers confess so succinctly, "Whereupon the will thus renewed, is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore also, *man is himself* rightly said to believe and repent *by virtue of that grace received*". Canons III, IV, Art. 12.

For this reason we repeat what we said at the close of our former article: "Must we hold fast to this great preached confession of the hope?" and we answered and do still answer with an emphatic: yes! That is the very real intent of the exhortation "hold fast", such is the stand of the Fathers of Dort and such as always, to the best of my knowledge, has been the stand of the Protestant Reformed Churches in and off the pulpit. At least, thus I have preached during the sixteen years of my ministry. And, let me add, I believe, that I have promised thus to preach and so have all of our ministers, when we signed the Formula of Subscription.

Then must man do something? Must he do something to be saved?



I would remind ourselves that the *believer* must do something to taste and see that the Lord is good. He must "walk in the faith", he must not trifle with the grace of election, nor refuse to walk in the *ways of the elect*. (Canons of Dort, I, Art. 13).

And he does this by virtue of the grace of election!

The question is: do the elect need this exhortation? Is it not so that it is impossible for the elect to perish? And then is it not true that no one is able to pluck them (the elect) out of the hand of the Father? To ask this question is to answer it.

The question is not whether the dogmatic statement is true, that the elect never shall perish. That is true. There is no falling away of saints! However we must say more than this mere sententia: the *elect can never perish*. We must also say: *why and how the Lord keeps them* from perishing. It is because the Lord our God keeps His own elect not only in the battle, but he keeps them *battling, fighting the good fight*, in the battle of life and faith. He keeps His own elect on their *qui vive* (on the alert) standing at their battle-post in life. And He does this by means of the preaching of the Gospel, so that through the hearing, reading, and meditating on this Word, we are preserved in the faith and walk of all the elect, even as we are also kept in the power of God through faith "by the exhortations, threatenings and promises of the Word". (Canons of Dort, V, 14).

And so the elect kept by this word and actuated by God to keep this Word by the grace of election, the elect shall never perish. And being thus actuated the elect very really enter the kingdom as by *their act, their deed of faith*. The *doer* in the believing is redeemed man; the *Actuator*, O glory of God, is God alone!

And thus he keeps us supplied and well-fed from the *fountain* of all saving-good, e-l-e-c-t-i-o-n! From this election "proceed *faith*, holiness, and other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to the word of the Apostle: "He hath chosen us (not because we were) but that we should be holy, and without blame, before him in love". (Eph. 1:4).

And so there is indeed a place, in the grace of election, also for the *admonition* to the elect. For admonitions and warnings are a part of the heavenly Father's "nurture and admonition" to keep us, by grace, walking in the ways of the elect.

And to those who thus walk in the ways of the elect God also *gives the blessed assurance* of His promised faithfulness. Surely those who do not walk in the ways of the elect as yet (though they are elect) as well as those who shall never walk in the ways of the elect, since by the sovereign and inscrutable and unsearchably wise will of God they were hated even

before they had done good or evil, surely to these also the admonitions and warnings are directed. They are seriously called unto faith and repentance. But these are not promised peace of mind and eternal life. This promise is very particular. It is for those who are the elect, who cry unto God day and night, as they concretely and very actually stand in the battle, battling in the full armor of God, and as they constantly need the courage of the battling warrior in their heart. (Een hart under den riem). They must hold what they have, lest anyone take their crown.

The elect receive this assurance in the battle. And this assurance is part of the *sealing* that they very really receive through the preaching of the gospel by the working of the Holy Spirit. The "144,000" are indeed sealed, sealed also for their own consciousness, but this sealing takes place through the preaching of the gospel, while they obey it. They thus make their calling sure and by making this calling sure; walking, *by virtue of God's grace*, in the ways of the elect, they are very really sealed in time, making their election certain.

(to be continued)

Geo. C. Lubbers.

## THANKSGIVING

Thanks be to God for His wonderful love!  
Praise ye His name for the gifts from above!  
Anthems of gladness peal forth on the breeze,  
Echo His greatness o'er land and o'er sea.  
Praise Him, ye sons of the blessed and good!  
Praise Him, ye mountains, and valleys, and flood!  
Praise Him, ye daughters and children of men!  
Praise Him from hilltop and forest and glen!

Thanks for the gift of His only dear Son!  
Thanks for His goodness life's journey to run!  
Thanks for the summers and winters between!  
Thanks for the autumn and spring ever green!  
Thanks for the aid, and for winds, and for sky!  
Thanks for the sun, and for the stars upon high!  
Thanks for the moon, for the day and for night.  
Thank Him for dew, and for rain, and for light!

Praise His great name! Let the nations adore;  
Redeemer and Saviour, God evermore;  
Enthroned with the angels, blessed above!  
Praise Him, O earth, for His wonderful love!  
Praise Him, ye smallest and greatest of all!  
Praise Him, ye kindred that rise from the fall!  
Praise Him, ye children of weakness and death!  
Praise Him, O praise Him, all ye that have breath!

Geo. D. Emerson—*Moody Monthly*.